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Broadband Policy Possibilities

Abstract:

There is tremendous interest at the state level on how state government can assist and encourage the development of ubiquitous and increasingly faster broadband networks. Whether legislative or regulatory, states and their leaders have a critical role to play in ensuring all of their households and businesses access, adopt, and use broadband to improve their quality of life.

Additionally, the federal government continues to consider, debate, enact, and implement legislation and regulations that will change broadband policies in America, and these federal actions will have a continued and growing impact on the states. With the sheer scope of federal policy changes underway, this is a critical time for all states to ensure their broadband policies and regulations can help the state cope with the impact those federal actions will have.

Part of Connected Nation's value to its public sector partners lies in technology and platform neutral policy expertise. This expertise is based in Connected Nation's data, research, and public policy subject matter experts. The result of Connected Nation's work is a wealth of data, research, and regular policy briefs on broadband-related subjects.

Because of Connected Nation's unique perspective as the foundation of so many broadband public-private partnerships across the US, it is approached on a regular basis for any insight it can offer on policy issues facing the states. Connected Nation routinely recommends that state Governors and Legislatures form bi-partisan, bi-cameral caucuses comprised of technology-interested legislators, supported by Connected Nation and public-private partnerships of broadband stakeholders, working as a state broadband council.

In general, a state's broadband policies should promote access, adoption, and use. States should realize that the private sector's investment in infrastructure will dwarf any government based fund, therefore directing resources toward adoption and use may be more efficient. States might want to include aspirational goals for both broadband adoption and broadband availability, and states might want to include a role for economic development to promote expansion of online tools for small and medium businesses and the manufacturing/agriculture sector.

Access, Adoption, and Use:

- **Establishment of an ongoing resource within state government for high speed broadband-focused efforts in the future/Create a program or mechanism to coordinate rural broadband installation with state and federal programs assisting hospitals, schools, libraries, and public safety facilities with obtaining broadband**
 - There are a number of federal programs designed to ensure that specific community resources (including hospitals, schools, libraries and public safety facilities) have access to high speed broadband service. There should be a resource within state government, such as public-private partnership enabled broadband initiative, to serve as a clearinghouse for this information. This resource would perform similar work on broadband adoption efforts and to incubate any thoughts or initiatives to enhance broadband use.





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Access:

- **Create a state loan guarantee program to assist smaller broadband providers in gaining access to capital expenditure funding**
- **Utilize the power of the state tax code to incent broadband providers to build in unserved/underserved areas**
 - **Provide a tax credit or grants, coordinating with broadband stakeholders to provide target areas that are underserved or unserved and provide priority for projects that will serve these target areas**
 - Create a sales tax exemption on equipment purchased for use in a central office to include the purchase of fiber optics and broadband equipment
 - Example: This proposal would exempt from state sales taxes fiber equipment necessary to deploy higher bandwidth speeds
 - Examples: the Mississippi broadband technology tax credit, the Idaho matching grant program, and the Wisconsin sales tax exemption and income tax credit
 - Would allow private providers to offset a portion of build-out costs to make build-out and service provision in unserved areas more cost effective.
 - Data and mapping resources could be used to ensure that the incentive was focused in regions currently underserved or unserved by high speed broadband and also verify progress
- **Coordinate and facilitate broadband deployment via the state's broadband initiative**
 - Implement a formal "Dig Once" process to coordinate highway construction and broadband deployment projects
 - Would allow the state to install broadband conduits in conjunction with rural highway construction projects
- **Establish a similar formal process to both allow the state to install conduit and provide an opportunity for broadband providers to install conduit, fiber, etc. when road construction projects are already scheduled to maximize opportunities for broadband providers and state, county and local transportation departments to collaborate**
 - Could reduce costs related to a lack of coordination and communication regarding rights-of-way, roadway and broadband infrastructure between transportation agencies and broadband providers. This would reduce costly multiple openings of infrastructure corridors, minimize inconvenience for travelers and citizens while reducing infrastructure project length
 - Could also spur engagement between state government and private providers
- **Encourage coordination at the state and local level aimed to achieve economies of scale and promote efficiency of public investments, including comprehensive planning for broadband in infrastructure projects by developing a statewide Fiber Collaboration Database**
 - Would allow broadband providers to view upcoming construction projects, notify the state transportation department of their interest in including broadband infrastructure

- in a project and provides opportunities for collaboration among companies interested in joint trenching opportunities
- California has a similar project, where the database is used by broadband providers to collaborate on projects and share construction costs when they wish to build in the same area
- **Assess the possibility of developing a set of state master contracts to expedite the placement of wireless towers on state government property and buildings.**
- **Facilitate further expansion of mobile 3G and 4G networks by streamlining local and state rules and regulations affecting the cost and build-out speed of towers supporting these networks**
- **Promote lower costs of access to key network inputs such as utility-owned poles, ducts, conduits, and rights-of-way**

Adoption:

- **Promote and facilitate local community engagement aimed to address local barriers to adoption and develop pragmatic solutions tailored to each community via the Connected Program.**

 - Helps promote broadband access, adoption, and use by helping a community develop a vision for how broadband will help achieve other community goals regarding economic prosperity, quality of life, innovation, and inclusion
 - Already in many states including Iowa, with 143 active communities and more to come
- **Create pragmatic digital literacy programs at the state and local level**

 - ECO includes both digital learning training programs (that could partner with local libraries) and low-cost computer options to battle two significant barriers to broadband adoption: lack of digital literacy and lack of a computer in the home
- **Amend the state tax code to create a tax deduction allowed to corporate taxpayers for charitable contributions of computer inventory for educational purposes**
 - Purpose is to encourage corporate donation of devices
 - Can be run through the ECO program
 - Would help state meet cash match requirements of SBI program
- **Increase funding to public libraries and schools for computer stations and Internet access**
 - Many US households do not have adequate access to computers or high speed broadband due to economic, demographic, or geographic factors. This proposal would seek to increase primary public access points, such as public libraries or public school

facilities, for “digitally disadvantaged” lowans and reward institutions that increase hours and access to their facilities

- The anticipated impact of additional resources would allow these public facilities to expand the number of public computer stations, increase hours of operations, and develop or enhance training programs via ECO. Priority could be given within the funding structure to libraries and schools in locations that are currently underserved or unserved by high speed broadband

Conclusion:

Connected Nation welcomes the opportunity to work with all states and communities on broadband deployment, adoption, and use. For more information on Connected Nation’s work in broadband policy, contact us at policy@connectednation.org.